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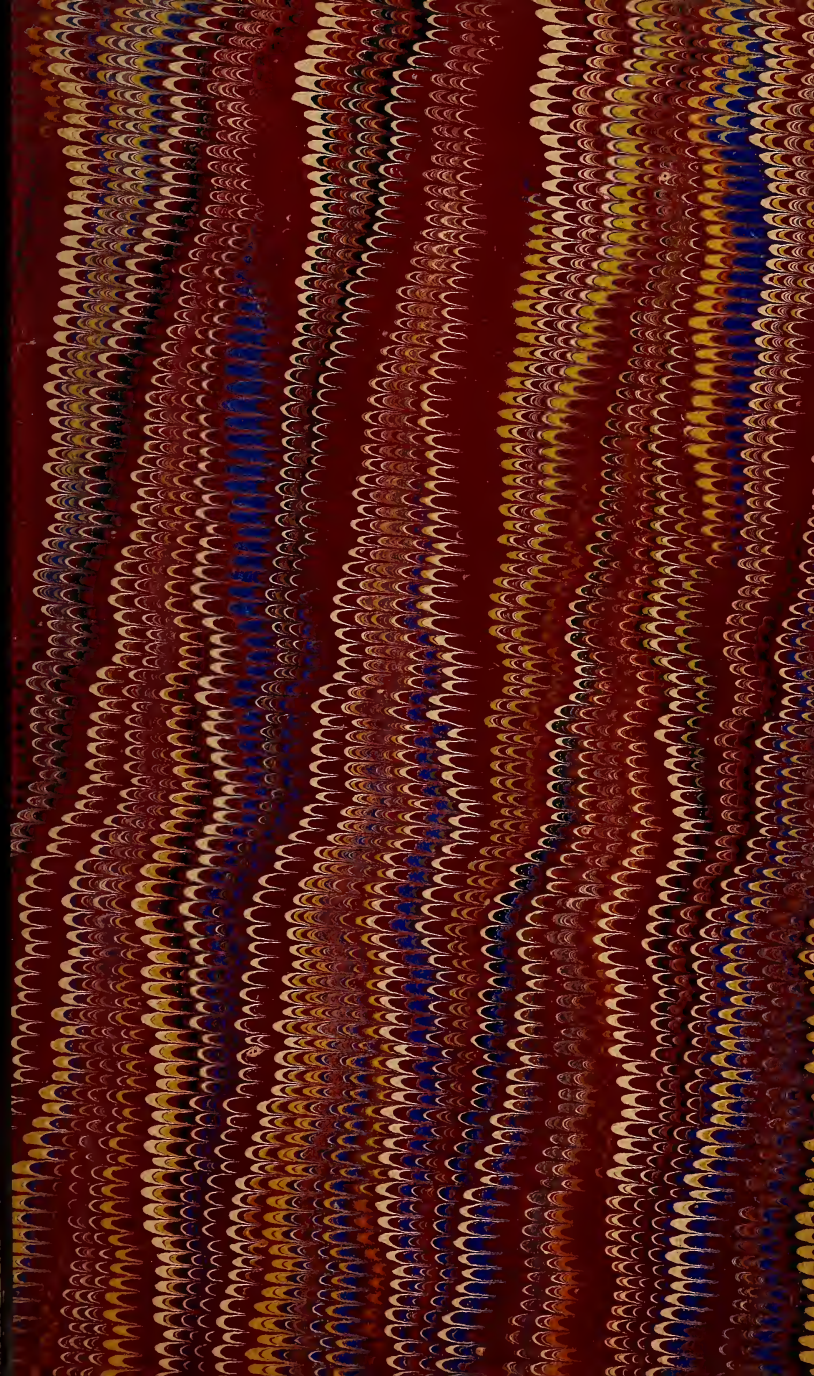
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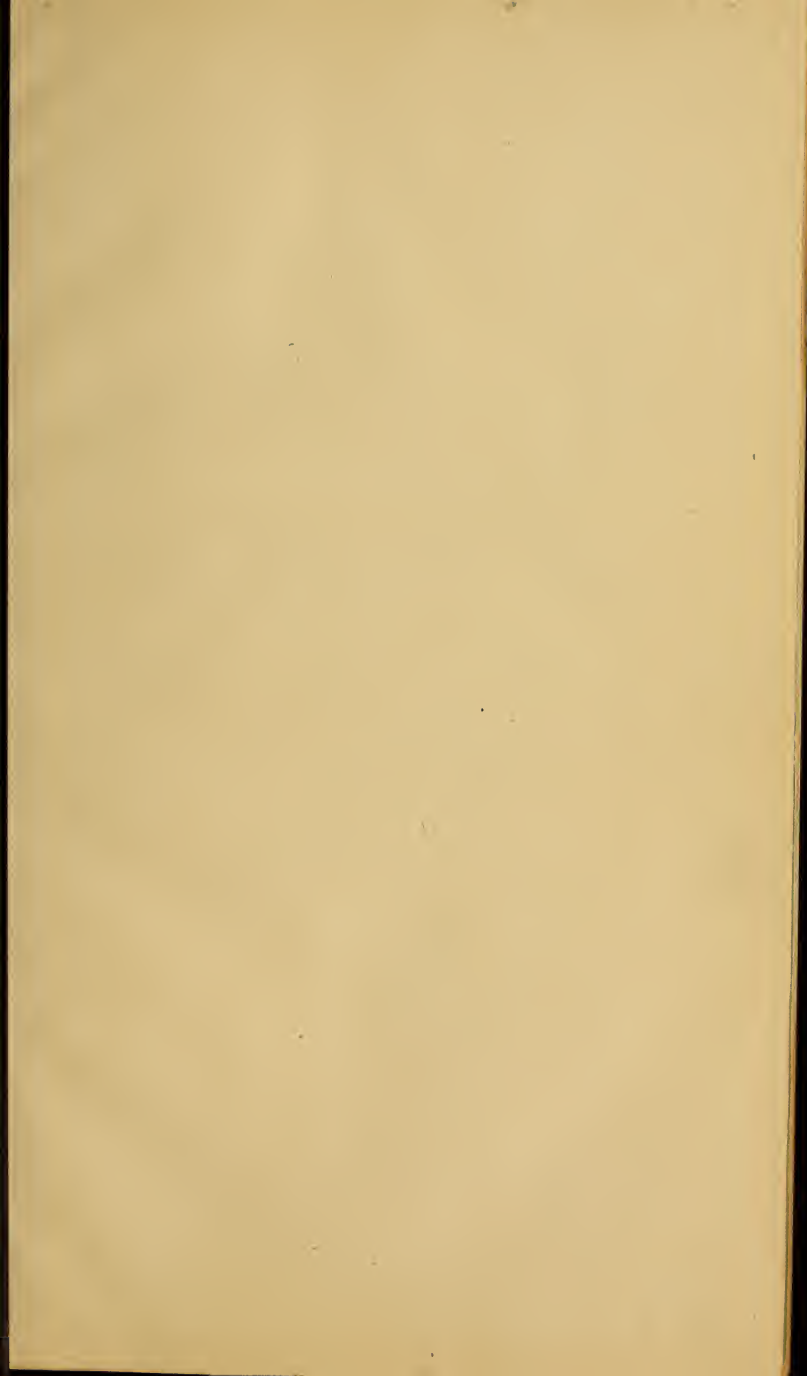
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THE
Adventures and Escapes

OF

HARVEY ROBBINS AND FAMILY

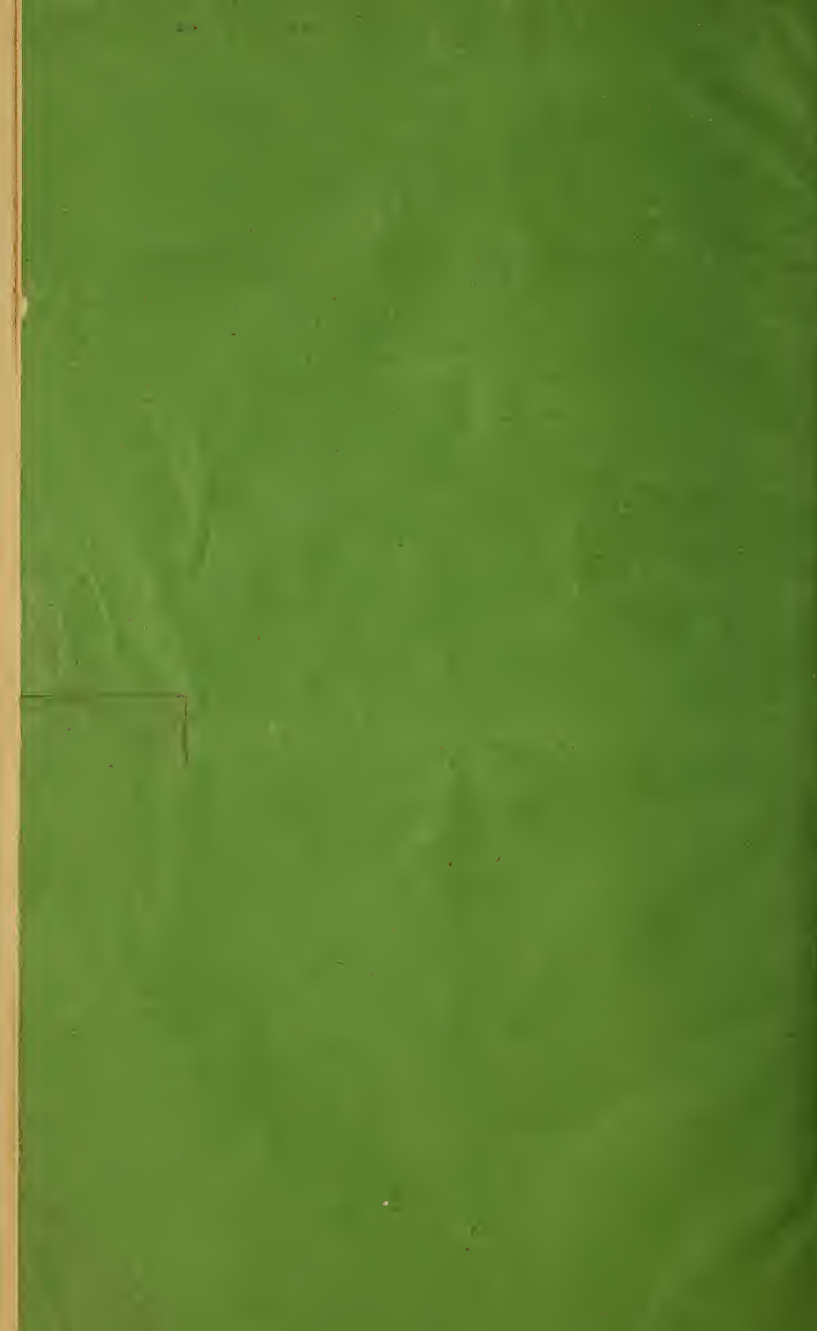
FROM THE REBELS,

Near Yorktown, Virginia.

BALTIMORE:
PRINTED BY SHERWOOD & CO.

N. W. COR. GAY AND BALTIMORE STS.

1861.



Nov. 25/62

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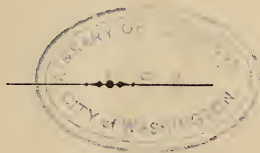
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TO THE PUBLIC.

THE adventures of the Author of this little book, together with the miraculous escapes of his family, can be testified to by thousands of his friends, and it is by their persuasion and his destitute situation that he now makes his life public. Having lost all that he possessed in the world, he now throws himself and his family upon the generosity of his friends.

H. ROBBINS.

THE ADVENTURES AND ESCAPES
OF
HARVEY ROBBINS AND FAMILY FROM THE REBELS,
NEAR YORKTOWN, VA.

I was born in Wayne county, in the State of New York, July 4th, 1824. My parents were connected with the first families of that State, and I was raised in the midst of refinement and affection. Death, that tyrant, however, threw his pall over my prospects, and bereft me of my protectors at an early age, thus leaving me an orphan, alone and friendless. Being naturally of a restless, roving disposition, I left for Michigan at the age of 15, and landed in Detroit on a beautiful day in June, 1841, with but 15 cents in my pockets. Having spent 12 cents of that sum for a night's lodging, I wandered around the city until the pangs of hunger caused me to enter a store and invest my last penny in something to eat. While thus engaged, I meditated upon my situation, and a desolate one it was, for I was homeless and moneyless, and I again set out on my weary wanderings. Providence, however, sent me a kind-hearted

stranger, who, taking compassion upon my helplessness, took me home with him and initiated me in the art of hunting.

Many were the expeditions we took together in the interior of that new State, some of which I will now relate. Upon one of them we started four panthers early in the morning, and followed them until late at night, when we lied down in the snow till morning. At the break of day we again started on their trail, and at last traced them to a large tree. Being aware of the nature of the animals, we approached them very cautiously, and as I was looked upon as the best shot, I was appointed to shoot one, which I did right through the heart. An Indian of our party next was chosen, and he fired, but only wounded the animal, who at once sprung down about 80 feet at me. I at once dodged him, and drawing my bowie-knife, made a dash at him, but only succeeded in slightly wounding him, and becoming goaded by the pain of his wounds he dashed at me with all the fury of his nature. My companions becoming frightened, they left me to my fate; so to bring the contest to a conclusion I made another pass at him, and gashed him fearfully. He struck at me with his paw, and at one time my life was in great danger; so seeing the necessity of making an end to the battle, I struck one blow which laid him dead at my feet. I was growing weak from loss of blood, and with great difficulty I crawled to a large tree, and rest-

ing myself behind it, I loaded and fired my gun three times, thinking by so doing I might call my friends to my assistance. It had the desired effect, and soon they came, and thinking I was dying, carried me carefully to our Rancho, about six miles distant, where they attended me until I was able to get out.

I now pass over two years of my life, at the end of which I was still with my friend of the backwoods. Growing weary of such a life, my mind came to the conclusion to change it, and so on the 29th of May, 1843, I started for new places and a new home. I passed through Chicago, Buffalo, Rochester and Oswego; at the last place I enlisted in the Fourth Artillery, company G, and soon found myself at Fortress Monroe, at which place we landed 10th August, 1844. We stayed there until the Mexican war broke out, and then we were ordered to Texas, where we landed upon the 1st September at Corpus Christi. We spent six months upon shore, and I must say that I never want to spend such another six months as I did those, for it was one continual rain the whole time. We took up our line of march in the spring to the Rio Grande, and reached our destination upon the 16th of March. Our company being the oldest in the service, we received orders to take up our position at a point called Fort Isabel, near the mouth of the above river, for the express purpose of protecting the Government stores. Upon the

opposite side of Metamoras the rest of the army were engaged in building a fort by the name of Fort Brown, which was twenty miles from Point Isabel. The Mexicans about this time began to grow very bold, and contemplated an attack upon General Taylor's forces in their passage from Point Isabel to Fort Brown. After the battles of the 9th and 10th of May, the details of which are matters of history, we left our quarters to join General Taylor at Metamoras. We then moved to a point within three miles of Monterey, in full view of all the works of the enemy. This place is highly blessed by the hands of nature, being surrounded by a beautiful grove of walnut and ebony trees, while a gushing spring poured out its waters for our thirsty army.

Upon the second day of our arrival, General Worth was ordered to take fifteen hundred men and cut off all communications between the cities of Monterey and Saltillo, and likewise to capture two small forts, one of which was known by the name of the Bishop's Palace. With a full determination to conquer or to die, we set off upon our mission, and reached our destination by 12 o'clock the same day. We were met by a force of one thousand of the lancers of the enemy, but soon put them to an inglorious flight, and when we were ordered by the General to storm a fort which stood some thousand feet above us, we went to our work in gallant style, and soon our "stars and stripes"

were thrown to the breeze in triumph. At 3 o'clock next morning we stormed and captured Bishop's Palace, and then we started upon our way to the city, and halted at last within one square of the main Plaza, where the Mexicans with seven thousand troops, were drawn up in battle array to receive us, but American valor again triumphed, and the enemy were routed. We encamped there until General Scott took the field, when we joined him at Lobos Island by forced marches. Men dropped down dead from the fervent heat of the sun, and the stoutest heart grew sick at the dreadful scenes which every where met our view. A soldier's life is one of change, and from the Island we were removed to Vera Cruz. It need not be told how we crushed all opposition, and suffice it to say that our march was on to conquering and to conquer, until the star spangled banner waved in triumph over the halls of the Montezumas.

After the hard-fought battle of Cerro Gorda, the company to which I was attached was selected as an escort to a train which was to be despatched to Vera Cruz. After marching some ten miles I fell behind, and was seized by six men, and carried to their camp, where I was bereft of all my clothing, and where insult after insult was heaped upon me, and threats were made to shoot me, which knowing the character of the Mexicans, I fully made up my mind would be carried into effect. I came to the conclusion that I might as well die in at-

tempting to escape, as to wait for their pleasure to shoot me, so I kept a good look-out for the first chance that offered itself, which by the by soon happened. I was to go with a sentinel to get some water about twenty rods from the camp, and as it was quite dark, I made up my mind to attempt my escape. Upon arriving at our place of destination, the sentinel placed his gun against a tree, which I no sooner saw, than I sprang towards it with all the quickness of which my nature was master of, and threw it in the spring, and then started off for the mountains, destitute as I was of clothing. The light of the moon alone guided me, and when the sun awoke from his sleep of the night previous, I was about 20 miles from the scene of my capture. I was completely dumfounded as regarded the road, and being weary and worn, nature gave way, and I yielded to the power of sleep. When I awoke I again started forth, and by a good Providence soon came across the road which led to Vera Cruz, where I stopped in the hope of meeting some of our friends, but, alas, night came, but no succor for me. I traveled all that night, and met various parties of the enemy, but always made out to avoid them. I was tired and hungry, and fell into a deep sleep, from which I was awakened by the sound of a bugle, and not knowing whether it was friend or foe, I kept perfectly quiet for at least a half hour, then hearing the approach of some horsemen, I gazed,

and was thrilled with delight as I saw they were some of our dragoons. They were commanded by Captain Harding, and were surprised at seeing me in the plight I was. The Captain inquired of me as to how I came in the situation I then was, and after I had given him a full statement, he ordered me to go to one of the wagons and feed and clothe myself, which I did, thanking God for his goodness all the while. After I had satisfied the cravings of hunger, I joined my company at a small village some seventy-five milles from Vera Cruz.

Eight days after we left our quarters and marched on to Mexico, and our limits will not permit me to give a detailed account of all the battles which took place before we reached that beautiful city, but suffice it to say, that it was by great struggling that we accomplished our conquest of Mexico.—The city itself is full of beauty, and abounds in all that can please the taste or attract the eye.—Her churches are unsurpassed in the richness of their splendor, and the gorgeousness of their decorations. Mexico was vanquished, and having thus defended the rights of our country, we returned home to the joys of domestic life.

Upon returning home I settled in the western part of Maryland, where I was elected captain of a volunteer company, but soon growing restless, I removed to Illinois ; but meeting with misfortunes on every hand, I resolved to pitch my tent in old

Virginia, which determination I soon carried into effect, and after taking a trip by the way of the Lakes and New York, I landed at Norfolk. Looking around for a good settlement, I bought a farm on Back river, near Yorktown, improved it by building, and stocked it with every requirement of a good plantation, and was but holding back until the commencement of spring to begin operations. But with the advent of spring the difficulties between the two sections of our country began to increase. What to do I knew not. I could not sell; all kinds of property was a dreg, and as to take up arms against the General Government, I could not; in fact, I had openly declared my fixed determination not to do so. Volunteer companies were raised all around me, and upon being offered a Major's commission in the rebel army by Colonel Magruder, I declined, and stated that I wished nothing to do with the existing contest. Things soon began to wear a most threatening aspect, and I almost dreaded what was to come, for my mind was resolved that I never would raise an arm against that flag which I had defended upon the plains of Mexico.

Upon the 16th of May, word was sent me by Colonel Magruder that he wished to see me at Yorktown. I at once obeyed the summons, and proceeded to his office, where I found him surrounded by his staff. He appeared much pleased by my promptness, and made me an offer of the

command of a regiment, which I was to raise in York county. I was to call all the men together of the respective ages of sixteen to sixty, and form them into companies, and all those who did not attend to the call I was to arrest and put in jail.

Upon the plea of ill health I declined his offer, and left him for my home—and upon my way my mind was perplexed as to what course to pursue. Affairs were coming to a crisis. I saw plainly that I could not stay where I was, and as to sell, that was an impossibility.

Soon after I had left Magruder he had an order issued that every man capable of bearing arms should meet at certain points, bringing with them such arms as they might possess, and those who failed to obey were at once to be arrested. I had been in the habit of visiting the shipping at Old Point by night, but was discovered and warned from repeating it; and the warning was accompanied by a threat of hanging. I replied that I did not respect their authority, and, being in a free country, would act as I thought proper; so that very night I again visited the blockading squadron. Upon my arrival next morning I discovered that they had been to my house, and had given utterance to threats of hanging me. They called me a “d——n Yankee,” and swore that I was a carrier of news to the d——n Yankees at Old Point. Feeling somewhat alarmed, I hurried back

swiftly to my boat, and had not been there but a few minutes before I saw my mother-in-law rapidly approaching. She brought me the tidings that there were four men at my house, with a rope with which to hang me, and gave it as her opinion that I had better make my escape to Old Point as soon as possible. I took her advice and sailed over the river to Old Point, thinking that they would extend to me their protection ; but, to my great surprise and mortification, the Colonel in command gave me to understand that he would not allow me to stay. I told him that I thought it quite a hard case, that as true and a loyal man as I was could not be protected by the Government in whose honor and for whose glory I was ready to fight. Colonel Demick explained to me that he could do nothing, and that my best plan was to proceed home and stay there. I turned away in disgust, and felt humiliated that our country had such officers ; and not knowing what else to do, I determined to go home and keep out of the reach of my enemies the best way I could ; so I started back, the distance being fifteen miles.

When I reached the river side it was near sundown, and feeling dubious about crossing over until after dark, I laid down in the midst of a thick woods which lined the river's banks. I had hardly gotten composed before I heard some men engaged in conversation, and raising up my head, my gaze fell upon three men, who, seeing me, rushed

towards my place of concealment with all their vigor. I had my rifle with me, and bringing it to a level, I commanded them to stop or to take the consequences. They no doubt thought "discretion the better part of valor," and therefore immediately halted. I at once demanded what they wanted of me, and was answered, "nothing." I then politely informed them that I gave them two minutes to leave, and if they did not I should most certainly shoot them. They left in double quick time, and as I thought they would return with an increased force to capture me, I hid myself in the bushes until night had drawn her veil across the face of nature. When darkness had settled down upon all things, I re-entered my boat and crossed the river, and after reaching the other side I went very cautiously through the woods until I reached the house of my brother-in-law. I gave a low tap at the door, and upon his opening it, I inquired "if they were still on the search for me." He told me that they had been, and that I must come in quickly, for if I was caught they would certainly hang me, as I was an infernal Yankee traitor.

He very kindly took me up stairs, and gave it as his opinion that I had better lie still that night, and then attempt to get to some of the loyal States; for as to stopping there any longer, it was not to be thought of. The next night I succeeded in reaching my home, and taking two blankets and

my rifle, went to the woods close by my house, resolving to stay there and wait until something should happen in my favor. I gave orders to my little boy Charley, who was twelve years of age, to come down every day to pick up chips, and to bring me something to eat, and to leave it in a certain large tree. The poor boy wept bitterly, and said :

“Papa, I will bring you something in the night, and not in the day.”

I was placed in a trying situation, one in which I never wish to be again. I held my trusty rifle always in my hand, for I was resolved to sell my life dearly. My little boy cheered me with his visits daily, and made me acquainted with all that passed ; and he would often say, “Papa, don’t let them catch you, for they swear they will kill you.” I stayed penned up in those woods for two long, tedious weeks, when, at the end of that period, my boy brought me the information that a new commander had been appointed at Old Point, and that my wife had requested me to again claim protection from the Government.

My mind was made up—I was resolved to try—so flinging my rifle across my shoulder, I started for the river, where I found a boat. Stepping in, I sailed nine miles up the river to a village by the name of Hampton, some three miles from Fortress Monroe. I stayed there over night, and in the morning went to the lines of the pickets, where I

met Colonel Duryea, of the New York 5th Volunteers. He made minute inquiries of me, and upon my informing him of the causes which led to my present situation, he took me down to the Fortress and introduced me to General Butler, who gave me a true soldier's welcome, and wished to know if I was acquainted with the country. Upon my answering satisfactorily, he stated to me his wish to obtain a guide, and that I should be well paid if I would act in that capacity. Colonel Allen, of the 1st New York Volunteers, happening to be in the office at the time, gave me an invitation to his regiment. A truer man, a braver soldier than Colonel Allen never breathed the breath of life. He took me to his tent, and treated me with the greatest respect. Time after time was I sent out, often at the risk of my life, until his regiment was ordered away. Having got the Colonel to make out my papers for my pay, which was three dollars a day for one month, I took them to General Butler, who at last, after I had called three or four times, put them in his pocket, and up to the present time, I have not, as yet, received one cent for my services; but I hope that the Government will see to it, for I have sacrificed everything for my country's cause, whereas, by proving a traitor, I could have now held a commission as Major in the rebel army. But no, kind reader, there is no traitorous blood in me, and rather would I suffer a thousand deaths than to raise my arm against that

honored flag bequeathed to us by the Father of his Country, and which I helped to defend on the well-fought battle plains of Mexico. No, no, my life is my country's, and shall be offered up as a willing sacrifice at any time her honor or her interest demands it. I can say with Webster—"Liberty and Union, now and forever, one and inseparable!"

I forgot to mention that I was a guide at the battle of Great Bethel, and if my advice had been taken, the guns and the men would have been taken. Three days after the above battle, I went to Colonel Allen for the purpose of obtaining from him a company of men, so that I might effect the deliverance of my family. My request was complied with, and by his orders Captain, (now Major) Clancey took a company of men and proceeded upon my errand. We had at least three miles to go to Back river, and then we were forced to cross as best we could. Upon reaching the river, but one small boat could be seen, so I informed the Captain that if he would allow me five volunteers, I would cross the river and attempt to reach my house. He at once turned to his company and addressed them, telling them that but five was wanted, yet they would smell powder before their mission was accomplished, and would run the risk of their lives. When he had concluded, every man stepped out. Selecting five men, he then said he would go himself—so we all crossed the river. After we had arrived within twenty yards of the

shore, we were greeted with the sight of sixty or seventy horsemen charging down full tilt upon us. Being familiar with the ground, I informed the Captain that nothing need be feared, as they could not reach us on account of a marsh between us and them. We landed on the shore, about six hundred yards from them, and a quarter of a mile from my house. We fired a volley at them, and at once they scampered off to the woods, thinking thus to decoy us up from the river. Upon glancing towards my house, I noticed an infantry company coming towards us at a double quick, and told the Captain that if we did not return soon we would be taken prisoners, and as for me, death was certain; so we again crossed the river, and made our report to headquarters.

It appeared, as I discovered afterwards, that they took the negro man prisoner who took us across, and forced him to divulge all that we had said. I had said that I would have my family at the risk of my life. They at once sent word to Yorktown that I had been over and fired on the troops, and General Magruder sent back word to offer one thousand dollars reward for me dead or alive, and to seize my wife and bring her to Yorktown, and confine her in the common jail; but she got wind of what was coming, and run out of her father's house and hid herself under a bridge. When the troops came to capture her, they asked after the d——n Yankee's wife; and upon being

told that she was not in the house, they searched every apartment in the building. For two days did they scour the woods for her, and searched every house for three miles round. In the meantime her father visited her place of concealment, and supplied her with the necessities of life. Upon the second day he wanted her to yield herself up, as it was his opinion that she would die where she was. She replied, that if he would bring her three little ones to her, she would attempt to pass the rebel sentries and gain the river; which he did, and so one dark night she started upon her dangerous journey. Providence must have certainly directed her, for she and her little ones passed on, in safety, and at last the welcome sight of the rolling river cheered her soul.

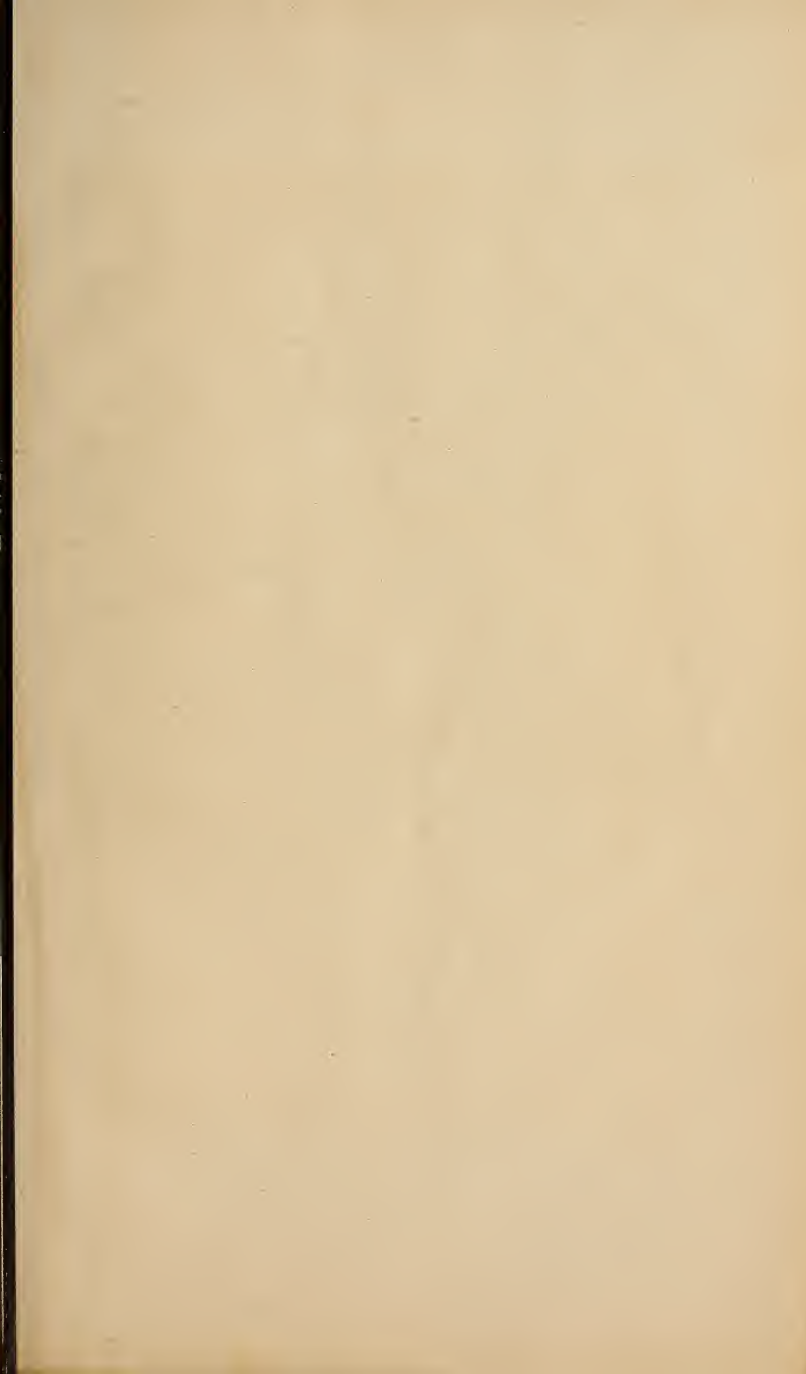
Upon reaching the bank she found a boat, and placing her jewels in it, she stepped in and set it adrift. She knew not where she would land. The river was two miles across, and the night as dark as Egypt. Fears took possession of her that she would be carried out into the ocean and lost; but she trusted in God, and that trust was not misplaced, for she landed at last on the opposite side. It was about 1 o'clock in the morning, and she, therefore, had to wait until daylight to discover her situation. She was forced to pass a house, and as she did so she trembled for fear of being recognized; but she was not, although a great many questions were propounded to her, such as—"Who are

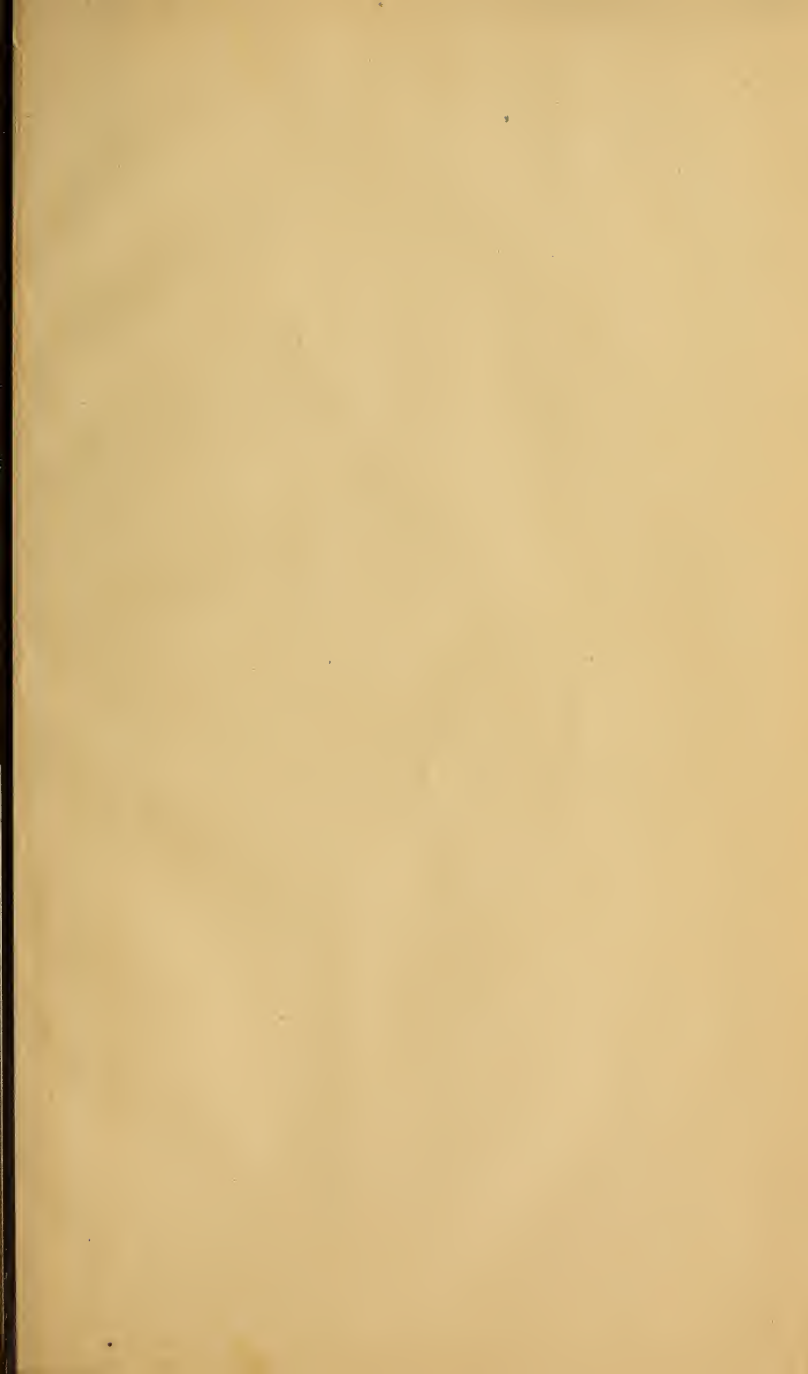
you?" "Where are you going?" &c. She replied, that her name was Miss Morrison—that she owned some property in Hampton—that she heard the Yankees had issued orders that those persons who had left must return. She was then warned not to go, as she would be captured; but she replied that she was determined to reach there if she could. They then wanted to know if she knew anything of that d——n Yankee that lived on the other side of the river, by the name of Robbins, who had joined the Union army at Old Point. She plead ignorance, but said that she had heard of him, and that he must be a mean man to fly from his home and join the enemies of the South. She at last left them, and after proceeding about five miles fell in with the pickets of our army. She safely reached the Fort, (her and her little ones,) and was taken before General Butler, who, knowing all the circumstances, sent her to Colonel Allen, of my regiment. Oh! the exquisite joy of that meeting. We were well provided for by the Quartermaster, and made as comfortable as things would allow.

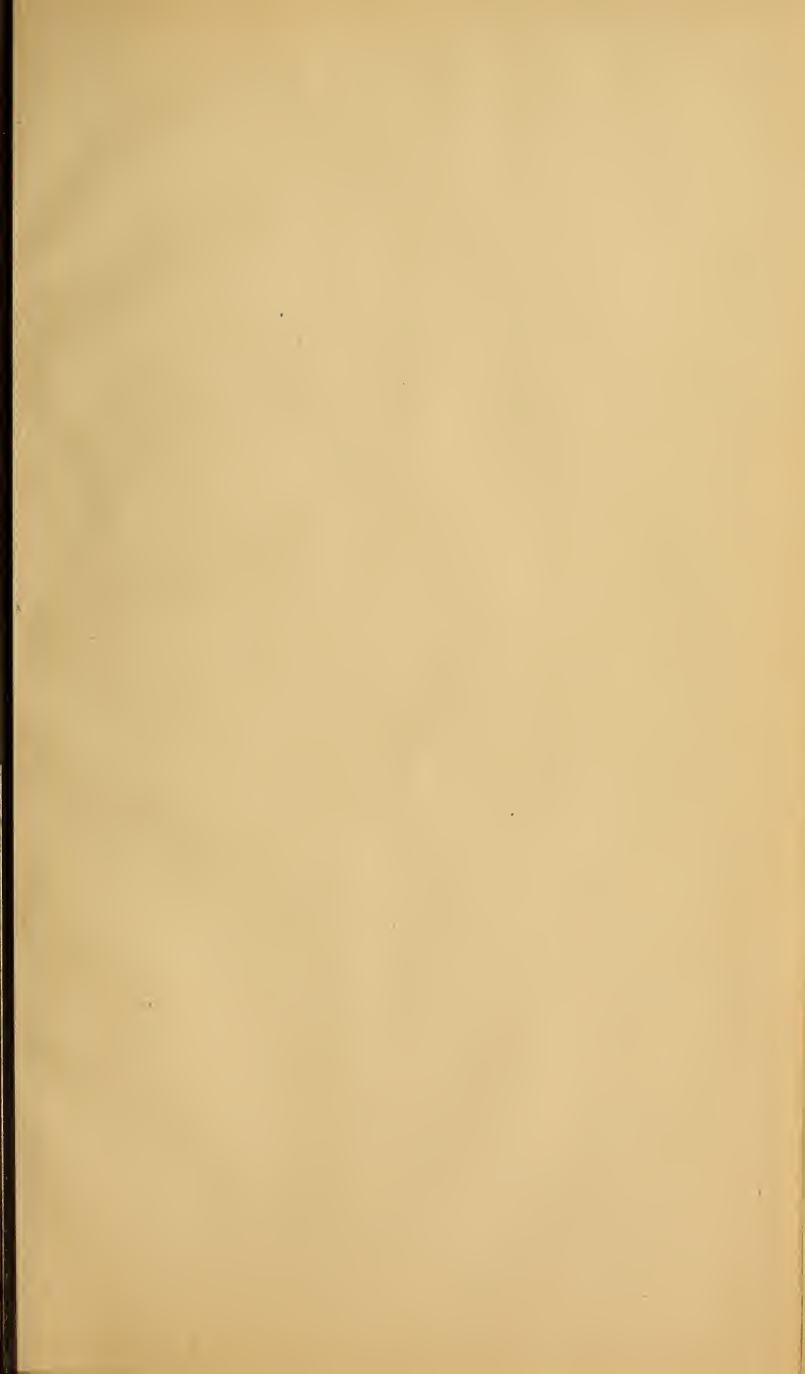
Dear reader, my story is done, and to God I am grateful that he has re-united me with my family. When I started from home I was possessor of fifteen cents, which sum was still mine when my wife reached me, and she only brought the clothes on her back, ten dollars, and our three children. To the First Regiment, N. Y. V., I shall always

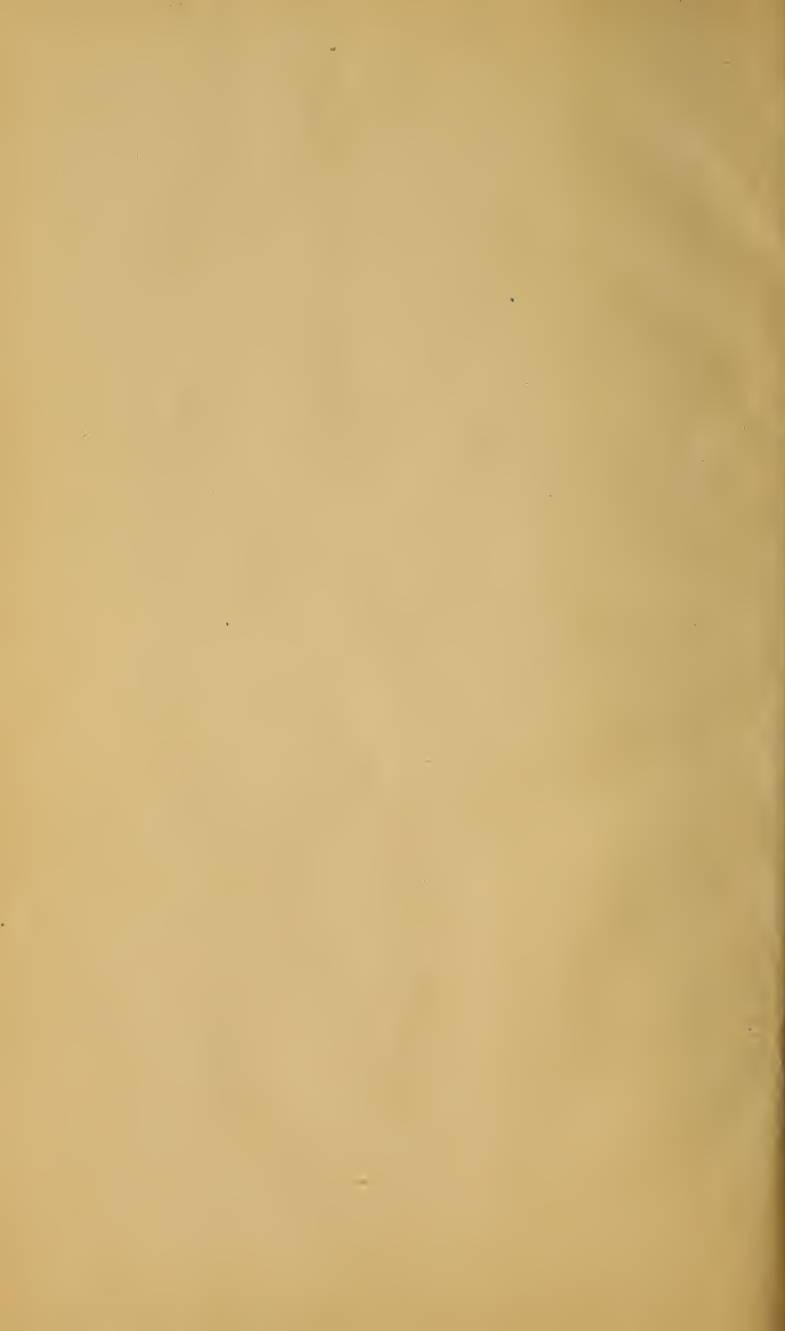
feel under many obligations. I was promised a commission by the Colonel, but through some difficulty he was forced to leave the service, but wheresoever he may be, may God bless him, for he was every inch a man and a soldier, and the battle of Great Bethel added lustre to his brow.

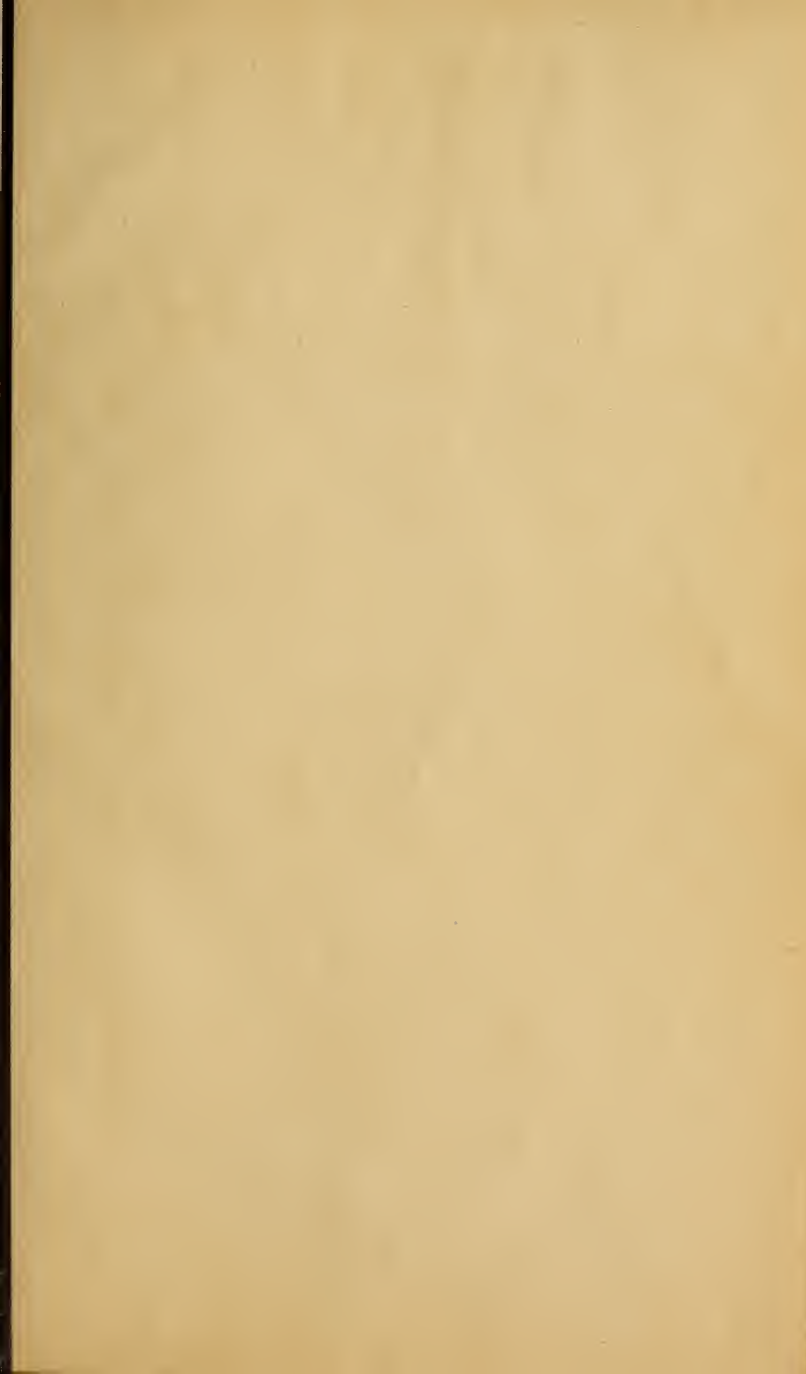
Dear, kind and generous reader, my plain, unvarnished narrative is now completed, and I launch this little book upon the tide of public opinion, hoping that your smiles may waft it on to the haven of success. I have passed through many vicissitudes of life—I have been tossed by the rough gales of adversity, and fanned by the balmy zephyrs of prosperity—but through every changing scene I have kept inviolate the love I bear my country. Fortune may frown upon me—summer friends may flit away at the first breath of the coming storm—but the deep devotion with which I cling to my native land shall never leave me, and my last words shall be—“First my God, and then my country!”

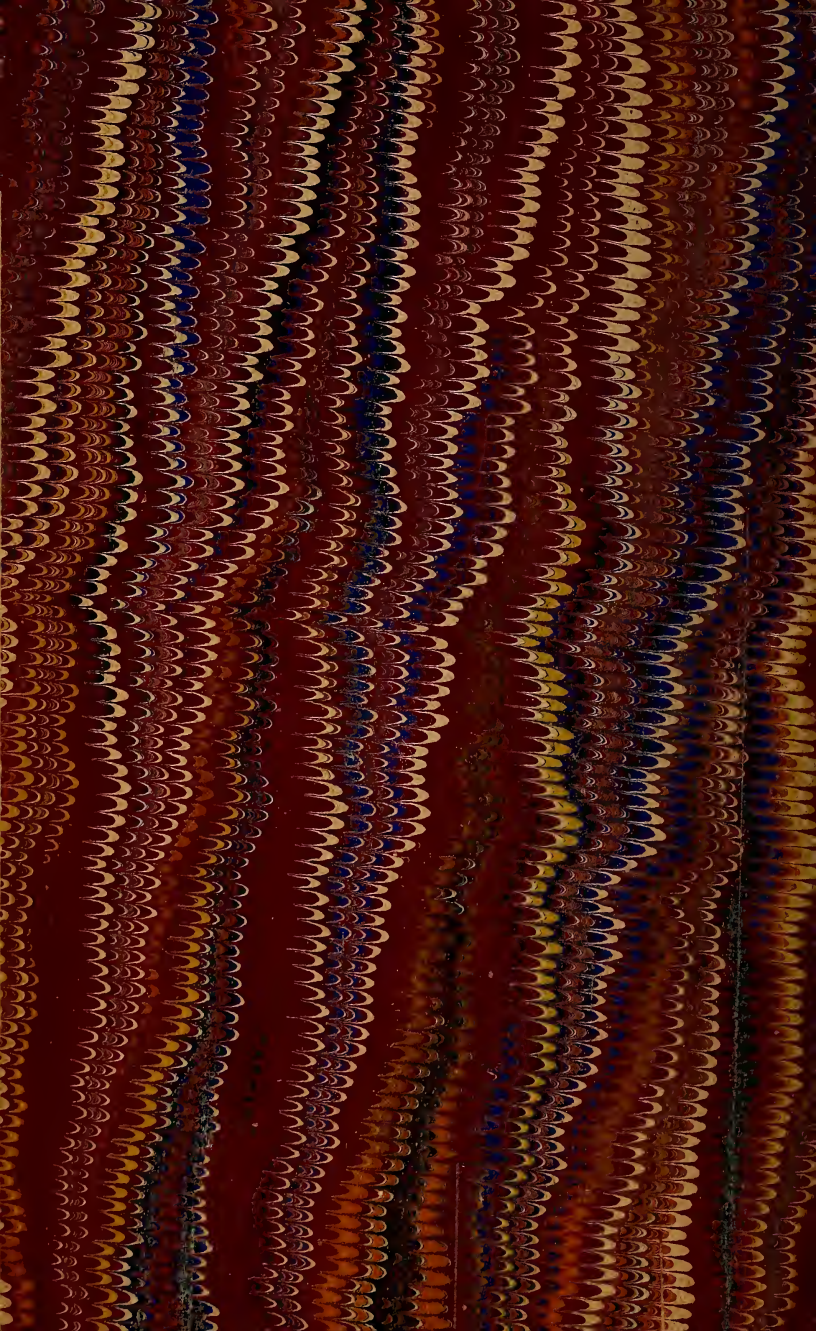














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